

Suspend Independence Bid, Bonn, Paris Urge Lithuania

By Edward Cody

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PARIS, April 26—France and West Germany, in a gesture toward President Mikhail Gorbachev, called on Lithuania today to suspend application of its declaration of independence from the Soviet Union to facilitate negotiations between the breakaway Baltic republic and the Moscow government.

The joint appeal, in a letter made public here by President Francois Mitterrand and Chancellor Helmut Kohl, went beyond the urging of the United States and most European governments that Moscow and Lithuania exercise restraint, avoid violence and enter into dialogue. It marked the first public suggestion by major Western powers that Lithuania's independence leaders should pull back from their challenge to Gorbachev.

Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis said he will carefully study the proposal from France and West Germany, the Associated Press reported from Moscow. Lithuanian parliamentary spokesman Ed Tuskenis, in a telephone interview from the Lithuanian capital, said Landsbergis had described the letter from Mitterrand and Kohl as "a step forward toward the realization of Lithuanian independence."

Lithuania wants immediate discussions with Soviet leaders, Tuskenis quoted Landsbergis as saying, and that "a termination of the Soviet economic blockade against Lithuania would be beneficial to the atmosphere of this dialogue."

"The leadership of Lithuania," Landsbergis added, "greatly appreciated this act of goodwill on the part of two noted leaders and will carefully study this letter's proposition."

Tuskenis said the letter did not mention revoking Lithuania's March

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Paris, Bonn Tell Lithuania To Suspend Declaration

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11 declaration of independence. The Kremlin, too, has called on Lithuania to suspend its declaration of independence, a retreat that Landsbergis and other Lithuanian leaders have so far vowed they will not make.

The letter, addressed to Landsbergis, also was communicated to the Soviet government in Moscow, French officials said. Mitterrand's spokesman, Hubert Vedrine, said its main purpose was to urge that the tense situation since Lithuania declared independence March 11 be resolved by negotiations.

"It would probably be appropriate, to facilitate the opening of these talks, to suspend for a time the effects of the decisions taken by your parliament, which would lose nothing of their value since they rely on a universally admitted principle: the principle of the self-determination of peoples," the letter said.

The 12-nation European Community appealed last Saturday for the Soviet Union to lift its economic embargo against Lithuania, calling on "all concerned not to carry through measures which are inconsistent with" the objective of a negotiated solution. Officials explained then, however, that the European declaration was not intended as an appeal for restraint by Lithuania.

In their letter today, Mitterrand and Kohl said they had nothing against Lithuania for "showing without equivocation its will to exercise its right to sovereignty." But they insisted at the same time that Lithuania's history "has generated a complicated situation made of multiple political, legal and economic links" with the Soviet Union.

In an earlier news conference by Kohl and Mitterrand closing a two-day meeting, Mitterrand pointed out that Lithuania was absorbed by the czarist Russian empire and then, after a period of independence, by the Soviet empire. Gorbachev, he said, bears the legacy of both absorptions, making his task particularly difficult in dealing with Lithuania's attempt to break away.

[An informed White House official said the that United States had "no advance knowledge and no advance involvement" in the Kohl-Mitterrand letter and offered no further comment on it. Bush has, however, been urging Lithuania to join a peaceful dialogue with Moscow for some weeks.]

At their news conference, Kohl and Mitterrand appeared to set aside recent differences over German reunification. They vowed to work in tandem for a swift European union, embracing security as well as economic aspects.

The show of friendship appeared designed to demonstrate that the two leaders have concluded that neither country can afford a Franco-German dispute as Europe enters a new era in East-West relations and West Germany seeks to reassure its allies about reunification.

The two governments had been at loggerheads over the last few months as Kohl pushed ahead with reunification without frequently consulting France, West Germany's closest partner in the European Community and fellow signatory of the North Atlantic Treaty. This enhanced French fears that reunification could lead Germany to drift away from its post-war ties to European neighbors and the United States.

Kohl, seeking to dissipate the mis-



ASSOCIATED PRESS

West German Chancellor Kohl, French President Mitterrand in Elysee Park.

understanding, joined Mitterrand in an April 19 initiative proposing that European leaders decide at a summit conference in Dublin Saturday to begin immediate negotiations on a political union that would include a common foreign and security policy.

The unexpected Franco-German suggestion, which would require speeding the pace of European integration by years, was seen as a demonstration by Kohl that he is as fervent in his faith in Europe as Mitterrand and is willing to tie Germany's security policies to those of its European neighbors.

In what appeared to be a return gesture to Kohl, Mitterrand broke

with past practice today by declining to support Poland's demand for an international treaty guaranteeing the postwar Polish-German border before the two Germanys unify. He said he would leave that matter up to Kohl.

In another illustration of his desire for amity, Mitterrand also suggested that France could eventually negotiate away its ground-based Hades nuclear missile in arms-reduction talks if the European security situation changes.

The missile, with a range of about 210 miles, is designed to replace by 1992 the current French short-range missile, the Pluton.